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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to investigate censorship attempts in Tennessee during the period 1966-1975 by consulting issues of the "Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom" published by the American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom. Tennessee's rate of censorship was found to be exactly the same as the national average. A total of 45 cases was reported during 1966-1975, with 11 in educational institutions and 34 in noneducational institutions, such as bookstores, theatres, and the press. A wide majority of the attacks, 89%, occurred in densely populated areas. Censorship attempts were initiated by a variety of persons, officials, and institutions. A film advisory board composed of citizens attempted multiple censorship efforts resulting in restrictions placed on the viewing of "Paper Moon," "American Graffiti," "The Sting," and other films. Reasons for censorship were difficult to ascertain, although obscenity was noted in 20 incidents. A growing trend can be noted in which organizations or groups present long lists of materials for censorship. In only slightly more than 20% of the cases were the institutions affected successful in resisting the censors. (MKM)

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Does "God Hate Hair?"

A Study of Censorship in Tennessee

Dr. L. B. Woods

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The notion of freedom of expression has a long and well-known history in Tennessee, one of the most famous censorship cases in the U.S., the Scopes trial, occuring in the state in 1925. Although this event took place more than half a century ago, the questions raised are still pertinent to educators and libraries today. Perhaps none of the censorship cases to be discussed in this paper will attract national attention, but librarians should be well informed in order to prepare for future visits from the censor.

The purpose of this study is to provide a look at censorship in Tennessee from 1966 through 1975. Data is presented showing location of attempts and their incidence on an annual basis, the initiators of the attempts as well as those affected, reasons for attempting censorship, and the dispositions of the attacks. Materials under fire will also be enumerated. This treatment does not claim to be exhaustive; rather its information is taken from incidents reported in ALA's Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom from the corresponding years.

It is helpful for the purpose of this study to compare Tennessee's censorship rate with that for the U.S. as a whole. The forty-five incidents in the state account for 2.0 percent of over 2,170 national occurrences that were within the scope of this study. If this percentage is then divided by the percentage of the state's population for the base year 1974 (4,129,000 or 2.0 percent)[1] the resulting index

[1] Bureau of the Census estimate

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of censorship is 1.00, which corresponds exactly to the national average. A comparison of the Tennessee data with similar information for other states may be made by consulting two articles the author published in Library Journal[2] in 1978.

Table I gives the number of censorship cases in Tennessee on an annual basis. Cases are divided into two categories: those occurring in educational institutions and non-educational institutions. Educational institutions encompass public and private schools (grades K-12), colleges, universities and all types of libraries. All other cases, such as those involving bookstores, theaters and the press, etc. are classified in the non-educational category.

TABLE I

Number of Censorship Attempts in Tennessee, 1966-1975

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Year	Cases	Year	Cases
1966	1	1966	1
1967	1	1967	0
1968	1	1968	0
1969	1	1969	1
1970	1	1970	5
1971	1	1971	3
1972	2	1972	8
1973	1	1973	4
1974	1	1974	7
1975	1	1975	5
	Total 11		Total 34

[2] An analysis of censorship nationwide is given in L. B. Woods, "For Sex: See Librarian." Library Journal 103 (1 September 1978): 1561-6, and "The Most Censored Materials in the U.S." Library Journal 103 (1 November 1978): 2170-3.

It is interesting to note that although educational attempts number only one-third as many as non-educational, the rate of occurrence in educational institutions is consistent throughout the decade of this study, whereas the frequency of non-educational censorship varies greatly from year to year. The latter case is more consistent with the national trend in which few cases were reported in the late 1960s with a large increase in the 1970s.

TABLE II

Places of Censorship Attacks in Tennessee, 1966-1975

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Clinton	1	Blountville	1
Hamilton County	2	Chattanooga	5
Jacksboro	1	Hamilton County	1
Knoxville	2	Johnson City	1
Memphis	3	Knoxville	3
Nashville	2	Madisonville	1
		Memphis	11
		Nashville	10
		Roane County	1

It is not only in the annual rate of occurrence that Tennessee varies with other states studied by this author but also in terms of geographical distribution of the attacks. (See Table II.) Most other states have been found to have cases dispersed fairly evenly throughout the state, but incidents are concentrated in the central portions of the state. The only occurrences reported west of Interstate 65 are those originating in Memphis. Tennessee does parallel other states, however, in that a wide majority of attacks occur in densely populated areas. Even though the state's population is basically rural, seventy-

five percent of the attacks occur in cities of over 100,000 people. Another fourteen percent of the cases occurred in areas within a twenty-five mile radius of major metropolitan areas, bringing the total percentage of urban related cases to eighty-nine percent. Since urban areas contain a more diverse population, it is not surprising that they give rise to more controversial, hence more objectionable ideas.

Censorship attempts are initiated by a wide variety of persons, officials, and institutions. Table III shows the sources of these attempts. Excepting those cases in which sources were not listed, the remaining thirty-five attempts were begun by thirty-three different individuals or organizations. This information weighs heavily when considering the rationale driving censorship initiators; if one organization allows its sentiments to be known, it opens the door for other organizations with similar feelings to object to the same materials. (It is easier to borrow a list of objectionable materials than to compile a new list!)

TABLE III

Sources of Censorship Attempts in Tennessee, 1966-1975*

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Administrator	1	Attorney General/District Attorney	3
Board of Education	1	Board of Education	2
Citizens	1	Chattanooga Municipal Auditorium Board	1
Faculty member	1	Church groups	2
Parents	2	Clergy	2
Public officials	2	FBI	1
School superintendent	1	Family	1
Source not listed	3	Federal Housing Admin.	1

*Some cases were initiated by more than one source and cited multiple reasons for censorship. Therefore, the totals listed in Tables III and IV may exceed the actual number of cases listed in Table V.

TABLE III, cont.

Educational Institutions	Non-educational Institutions	
	Federal Grand Jury	1
	Individual	1
	Judge	1
	Memphis Board of Review	3
	Network Station managers	2
	Parent	1
	Police	2
	Political candidate	1
	Prison officials	1
	Radio Station manager	1
	State of Tennessee	1
	Not listed	7

The one organization which did attempt censorship on multiple occasions is the Memphis City Board of Review. Its first appearance, in August 1970, was as an advisory board composed of thousands of citizens who would fight "smut" by wearing identifying pins and boycotting non-participating merchants.[3] Their second identified effort was an attempt to change the film version of Love Story's PG rating to R; this was not successful.[4] Finally, through its efforts, the city's obscenity ordinances were made so stringent that restrictions were placed on juveniles viewing Paper Moon, A Touch of Class, American Graffiti, The Sting and other popular films.[5]

[3] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 19 (October 1970): 88.

[4] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 20 (May 1971): 78.

[5] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 24 (January 1975): 17.

One of the most difficult segments of this study is to categorize censored materials by reasons for the attacks. (See Table IV.) In a few instances, no reason for initiation was given; in other cases, numerous causes were espoused; in still others, the reason was stated but so poorly defined as to be essentially meaningless. There were twenty incidents which named obscenity as the justification for suppression. Undoubtedly, each one of the twenty initiators had a different definition of obscenity.

TABLE IV

Reasons for Censorship Attacks in Tennessee, 1966-1975

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Freedom of expression	1	Bad publicity	2
Homosexuality	1	Blasphemous	1
Language	1	Closed meetings	2
Obscene	2	"Distasteful"	1
Racism	1	"God hates Hair"	1
Religion	2	Invasion of privacy	2
Sexual content	2	Language	3
Not Given	2	Nudity	1
		Objectionable	1
		Obscene	18
		Racial	1
		"Smut"	1
		Violence	1
		Violation of gag rule	1
		Not given	1

Although the musical Hair was censored across the nation, reasons vary from place to place. In Memphis, a minister led a group of pickets around the theater in an attempt to limit the number of people in the audience. The rationale for picketing was displayed on their placards - "God Hates Hair."[6]

[6] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 21 (May 1972): 76.

A unique justification for a complaint, if not a unique target! And in Nashville, the station manager at WLAC refused to allow In Cold Blood to be shown on the air stating that the violence in it was too great. The substitution made was The Bedford Incident, which may be considered even more violent than In Cold Blood since in The Bedford Incident there is a higher body count.[7]

The all-encompassing nature of censorship attempts can again be realized by studying Table V, especially for non-educational listings. As far as affected institutions are concerned, theaters and bookstores are generally among those popularly attacked; Tennessee also shows a variety of other places such as prisons, individuals, churches, and media related organizations. The educational institutions involved are classified by grade levels; public libraries are also included in the educational listing.

TABLE V

Institutions Affected by Censorship Attempts in Tennessee, 1966-1975

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Elementary school library	1	Amusement Co.	1
High School	2	Bookstore	5
College/University	3	Business	1
Public library	2	Churches	3
All levels in schools	2	Film distributors	1
School library (level unspecified)	1	Home (private)	1
		Individual	1
		Press	6
		Prison	1
		Theaters & Auditoriums	11
		TV/Radio stations	3

[7] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 22 (Janaury 1973): 22.

Of the forty-five cases reported in Tennessee, only four (nine percent) were aimed at libraries. This probably indicates that Tennessee librarians are not reporting censorship attempts to the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom. Most libraries experience censorship threats and it is a mistake to assume they are safe from attack. Those who attempt to censor materials ususally do so with missionary zeal. The more they succeed, the more determined they become to rid the world of pornography, obscenity, blasphemy, Communism, and other dangerous ideas. Libraries are increasingly being attacked nationwide, and as the wave of censorship increases, it has become more difficult to stop.

But censorship can be stopped. An example is the appeal concerning a Tennessee statute requiring textbooks to present equal space to biblical and scientific theories on the creation of the universe. Affecting all levels of schools in Tennessee, a district court judge declared the equal space requirement unconstitutional since it was in violation of the First Amendment guarantees of freedom of religion.[8]

Some attempts at censorship appear to be extremely non-selective in their operations. In 1975, elementary school libraries in the Hamilton County school system were asked to remove or not to purchase some 200 titles. No reasons were given other than the books were unsuitable for that system.[9] This was one of the most extensive cases reported during the decade studied in the entire nation, given the number of items targeted for censorship. It is indicative of a growing trend in which organizations or groups present increasingly longer lists of materials for censorship.

[8] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 24 (November 1975): 176.

[9] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 24 (September 1975): 139.

An earlier case in 1972 also affected a school library. Parents in Clinton objected to the books Catcher in the Rye, Catch-22, and Manchild in the Promised Land. The last two books were eventually placed on a restricted list. Catcher in the Rye was allowed to remain on the open shelves.[10]

The following two cases are illustrative of the way the press was affected by censorship attempts. Robert L. Taylor, an unsuccessful candidate for the Tennessee Supreme Court, accused the editors and reporters of the Nashville Banner of damaging his chances for the post because they did not divulge sources for the story material which he felt to be injurious to him and his campaign. This prompted a constitutional test of Tennessee's Shield law which allows editors and reporters to protect confidential sources. Reporters argue that being required to identify their sources would discourage witnesses from coming forward, thereby threatening freedom of the press. In this case, the courts agreed, and the Shield law was upheld.[11] But at a Roane County Board of Education caucus, censorship prevailed. Reporters were denied admission to the usually open meeting with no reasons given.[12]

This article does not attempt to list all censored materials, but the wide variety contained in Table VI is illustrative of what came under attack. The listing does not vary greatly from the national listing: Catcher in the Rye and Manchild in the Promised Land are represented, but another prey that was a national favorite, Soul on Ice,

[10] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 21 (May 1972): 72.

[11] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 24 (September 1975): 145.

[12] Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 23 (November 1974): 157.

does not appear. Assualts on films vary from a version of the James Joyce classic Ulysses to Deep Throat and The Devil in Miss Jones. And local entries show up in the form of newspapers, television, and radio stations.

TABLE VI

Materials Under Censorship Attack in Tennessee, 1966-1975

Educational Institutions
Books:
Blueschild Baby
Catch 22
Catcher in the Rye
Dinky Hooker Shoots Smack
Fantastic Voyage
Jazz Country
Manchild in the Promised Land
My Darling, My Hamburger
Nutshell Library
Portnoy's Complaint
Run, Shelley, Run
Sylvester and the Magic Pebble
Titles not listed:
Texts dealing with evolution
Texts dealing with biblical and scientific theories of creation
Film:
Ulysses (based on James Joyce's writing)
Individuals:
African Heritage Dance group
Dick Gregory
Faculty member

Non-educational Institutions

Books:

The Joy of Sex
Unpublished manuscript

Films:

American Graffiti
Bananas
Bang the Drum Slowly
Bushwaker
Butterflies are Free
Cry Uncle!
Days of Sin and Nights of Nymphomania
Deep Throat
The Devil in Miss Jones (3)
In Cold Blood
The Lie
Live and Let Live
London Night Life
Love Story
Mad Loves of a Hot Vampire
Oklahoma Crude
Old Miss Bodie
Paper Moon
Sleuth
The Sting
Teacher's Pet
A Touch of Class
Wife Swappers
Without a Stitch
Other titles not listed

Plays:

Hair (2)
Jesus Christ Superstar

Magazines:

Becoming
Motive
Playboy
Others with unspecified titles

TABLE VI. cont.:

Newspapers:

Chattanooga Times
Johnson City Press-Chronicle
Oak Ridger

Individuals:

Editor, reporter and former editor of Nashville Banner
Editor of Monroe County Observer
David Cassidy and his recordings

Others:

Obscene materials (form not given)
Smut
Copies of home appraisals and names of appraisers

Isaac Asimov's Fantastic Voyage and Maurice Sendak's Nutshell Library were among the titles listed. Publications of religious origins were no exception to censors; the head of the United Methodists educational unit postponed an issue of its publication due to obscene language.[13] (Apparently, the issue was never released.)

Individuals can be censored by means of demonstrations at planned addresses, failure to invite a suggested speaker, or even the rescinding of an invitation after it has been extended. This last example was the reason Dick Gregory did not appear at the University of Tennessee after being invited by students.[14] Chancellor Charles H. Weaver felt that Gregory had nothing to say to the University community and that his appearance would have been an outrage and an insult to citizens of the state. Weaver's actions were an outrage and insult to the students as well as the Black community.

13 Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 18 (July 1969): 65.

14 Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 18 (January 1969): 4.

The final table (Table VII) presented in this study shows the disposition of the attacks in the state. A "successful" attempt means that the initiator of the endeavor was able to accomplish the desired goal: that is usually the removal of books from shelves, closings of stores, or criminal actions against individuals. "Partially successful" results are those in which restricted access to materials occur. For example, obtaining parental approval before certain books could be checked out of the library, or a list of books for which oral reports may not be given. "Unsuccessful" attempts mean that the initiators did not achieve any of their desired goals. Finally, there are some cases in which no disposition is known because the incident may never have had a follow-up story in the Newsletter.

TABLE VII

Disposition of Censorship Attempts in Tennessee, 1966-1975

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Successful attempts	4	Successful attempts	18
Partially successful	2	Partially successful	4
Unsuccessful attempts	2	Unsuccessful attempts	7
Not Known	3	Not Known	5

In Tennessee's situation, the disposition is known in thirty-seven of the forty-five cases reported. Of the thirty-seven, twenty-eight were either successful or partially successful - greater than seventy-eight percent of the cases. In only slightly more than twenty percent of the cases were the institutions affected successful in resisting the censors. One case in five is hardly a figure to be proud of when it is considered that one of the principal tenets of intellectual freedom is to allow

people the right and privilege to read and view materials of their own choosing.

Conclusion

The data provided in this paper is designed to make educators and librarians more aware of situations and materials which are potential censorship targets. You can prepare to deal with censors in several ways. First, a statement on intellectual freedom should be written into the library's selection policy. The statement should make it clear that patrons have the right not to use materials which they find objectionable but have no right to deprive others of access to them. Also, it should be stressed that the policy is the official policy of the school with the backing of the library staff; faculty, particularly the English department; the administration; and trustees. Second, schools would require a formal, written and signed complaint about the material in question before the complaint will be considered. The school's official stance against censorship and the fear of publicity will usually discourage all but the most fanatical censors.

Finally, to deal with the most determined censors, educators and librarians should be well acquainted with their legal options. They should be aware of the most recent court rulings (both federal and state) in order to be aware of the extent of their rights. Also, they should compile as many historical, political, legal and professional opinions as possible to support their own positions. In the event that a censorship case should go to court, the more evidence educators have in support of their positions, the more chance they have of success. No defense is a guarantee that intellectual freedom will always prevail, but the lack of a determined, well-supported, and intelligent effort by educators and librarians (and all who oppose censorship) could be a guarantee that it will never prevail.